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Young Jack Harkaway IN THE WILDS OF SIBERIA.

By BRACEBRIDGE HEMYNG.



Jack raised his hand, in which was a pistol. Irrosk was too quick for him. With a blow from the flat of his sword, he knocked him senseless on the floor.

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Young Jack Harkaway

IN THE WILDS OF SIBERIA.

By **BRACEBRIDGE HEMYNG,**

Author of "Young Jack Harkaway in Armenia," "Young Jack Harkaway Fighting the Slave Traders of the Soudan," "Young Jack Harkaway in Cuba," "Young Jack Harkaway and the Boers of the Transvaal," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

YOUNG JACK HARKAWAY INTERESTS HIMSELF IN BEHALF OF THE RUSSIAN NIHILISTS.

It was the middle of an unusually severe winter in St. Petersburg, the famous Capitol of Russia.

Deep snow covered the ground.

The thermometer had sunk many degrees below zero, and the cold was intense.

Sleighs and droskies made the air melodious with their bells.

Young Jack Harkaway, Harry Girdwood, Mole, Monday and Mrs. Clara Harkaway, were guests at the Shonvaloff Hotel.

This was situated on the Morri Prospect, facing the river Neva, which was frozen over.

A dull, leaden sky hung over the city, threatening a further fall of snow.

Jack had taken an interest in the cause of the Nihilists, as the socialistic reformers in Russia are called.

He had come with his wife and friends to the city of the Czar, in order to investigate.

It was a dangerous game to play.

He had a deadly enemy in a Russian police spy, whose name was Irrosk.

This fellow had sworn to ruin him.

Jack, with his usual recklessness, laughed at his threats, but he had yet to discover that Irrosk the Russian could bite as well as bark.

Irrosk was high in the confidence of Prince Komeski, chief of the secret police.

A more determined and merciless irresponsible official never existed.

One morning, in the month of February, Komeski was closeted in his private room at the police bureau with Irrosk.

The sun had not been seen for weeks.

Outside all was dull and gloomy.

Pedestrians hurried along the streets clad in heavy garments lined and trimmed with fur.

"Who is this man Harkaway you talk about so much?" asked the prince.

"A dangerous suspect, sir," replied Irrosk. "He is a rich foreign adventurer, and calls himself the friend of the poor and oppressed."

"Ah! he must be suppressed."

"Without delay."

"What country is he a citizen of?"

"Either England or America—I do not know which."

"Pshaw! the United States dare not touch us; neither are we afraid of England. She had enough of the Russian bear in the Crimean war."

"Harkaway has been interfering in the Soudan lately, also in Armenia and the Balkans."

"Such a man must be put down. What do you suggest in the emergency?"

"Transport him for life to Siberia."

"It shall be done."

"We must have proof of his conspiracy with the Nihilists before we act."

"There are quicksilver mines in Irkutsk; four years in that district will kill him."

"You promised me the governorship of that district," Irrosk exclaimed.

"You shall have it," replied Komeski, "if you capture this adventurer."

"I think I can manage it without any difficulty."

"How will you do it?"

"There is a Nihilist club at No. 10 River street. They meet every Thursday evening at eight o'clock."

"That is to-night?"

"Precisely. I have only just discovered it through the aid of one of the members who is a traitor."

"His name?"

"Nicholai. The fellow will do anything for money."

"We will arrest this nest of vipers."

"I have promised Nicholai pardon and immunity," said Irrosk.

"Why make any distinction?" asked the Chief of the Police.

"Simply because he will aid us."

"In what way?"

"Nicholai has already made the acquaintance of Harkaway, who, as I told you, sympathizes with the rebels or Nihilists. Call them what you like."

"To the bottomless pit with them."

"So I say."

"Proceed."

"So say I again, and all of us who are friends of good government, and our father, the white Czar."

"These hounds do not hold with us," remarked the prince; "they want a parliament, and the ruling of the people by the representatives of the people."

"As if that would do them any good."

"Ridiculous."

"The Emperor Alexander liberated the serfs. What did he get by it?"

"Assassination."

"Quite so," answered Irrosk. "Your highness sees that our people are not fit for self-government."

"But with regard to Harkaway."

"I am coming to that. Nicholai, if it is your wish, will call upon Harkaway to-day and invite him to this secret meeting to-night."

"What then?"

"I will raid the house in River street and capture Young Jack red-handed with the Nihilists."

"That will be sufficient."

"I have your orders to that effect?"

"Certainly," rejoined Komeski. "He shall be deported with the next chain gang to Siberia."

"And I?"

"You shall be made Governor of Irkutsk."

"Thank you, my prince."

"It is your reward. You will have earned it, though I shall be sorry to lose your services here."

"You will find a good man to fill my place."

"Never. You are the king of detectives and the emperor of spies."

"I try to do my best."

"And you have succeeded," replied the prince.

Irrosk felt flattered at this compliment.

"I will see Nicholai presently at my hotel and everything shall be carried out to your entire satisfaction," he said. "If Harkaway is not checked there will be a revolution."

Prince Komeski believed what he said.

But there was a deep underhand purpose in his mind all the time. Young Jack was not plotting against the Russian government or empire.

He just wanted to find out the facts of the case as he had done in Cuba and elsewhere.

Irrosk knew that Jack was very rich.

Report had it that he was a millionaire, and for once rumor spoke the truth.

Jack was very wealthy.

His father had not given him much. What he possessed he had made for himself.

It was his spirit of adventure that had done it.

The idea Irrosk had in his head was this.

To begin with, Prince Komeski, Chief of the Russian police, had made him governor of Irkutsk.

This was an important position.

He would have unlimited power.

In fact, he could do exactly as he liked.

Now he argued that if Jack was consigned to the most bitter sort of captivity and slavery he would be glad to buy himself off.

But he did not yet know Jack's obstinate disposition.

You can bring a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink.

So it was with Jack.

He might be led, but not driven.

Yet Irrosk was firmly of opinion that he could by coercion compel Jack to give him an amount which would be a handsome competency for life.

This was what he was working for.

He intended Young Jack to be his victim, and it was not a bad scheme.

How it turned out will be seen as our story proceeds.

Having gained full power to act as he pleased from the chief of the police, Prince Komeski, the villain, with a respectful bow quitted the office.

He walked about a quarter of a mile until he came to a small, modest looking hotel.

This he entered.

In the hall he found a man who had evidently been in waiting, for he approached him with outstretched hand.

It was Hunston.

Jack's most implacable foe.

He and Irrosk were working together to accomplish their end.

One wanted revenge; the other, money.

Snow began to fall ere he reached his hotel where he lived whenever he lived in St. Petersburg.

It was not a fashionable resort, but at the same time it was comfortable, homely, and just the kind of a place for a detective or a commercial traveler to stay at.

Walking into the cafe, which was fitted up with sofas and chairs, which invited ease and rest, he sat down.

An attendant brought him coffee and a cigar, which he lighted and smoked placidly.

It was now midday.

Presently a man entered and shook hands with him.

He was Hunston, who followed Jack like a shadow wherever he went.

Out of a mad desire for revenge for an injury done to one of his family years ago by Jack's father he had tried to kill him.

Several attempts had been made.

In all these he had failed.

Since he had made the acquaintance of Young Jack's Russian foe, Irrosk, he had gone on another tack.

This was to hunt Jack down and screw all the money he could out of him.

He wanted to impoverish him.

The two villains sat down together.

"How is business?" asked Hunston. "Does the prince relish your idea?"

"*Sehr gut!*" replied Irrosk.

"Is all settled?"

"Everything. Nicholai will take him to the secret meeting place of the Nihilists to-night, at eight o'clock, No. 10 River street, in this city."

"And then?"

"I shall raid the place with a posse of police, and we will railroad Harkaway to the wilds of Siberia."

"What good will that do us?"

"A lot."

"But we shall be far away."

"Not so. I am appointed governor of Irkutsk. You can come with me to that place. The prisoner will be made to work in the quick-silver mines there."

"Good, he will be under our eyes."

"Under our lash. I will knout him once a day," said Irrosk.

There was a terrific gleam in his fierce eye and his mustache bristled as he spoke.

The punishment of the knout was inhuman.

A man is stripped naked and tied to a post. The executioner has a long knotted whip, which he throws round the body of his victim.

It is wielded by a practised hand.

Every coil of the lash lacerates the body, tearing away strips of skin.

Even women are subjected to this torture in Russia.

Many people have been known to expire under the punishment. It is often a death penalty.

"We can do what we like with him in your new district," observed Hunston.

"I should rather think so," replied Irrosk, "and if he does not come down with a million of roubles, let him look out for himself."

"That is your decision."

"Undoubtedly. Pay up or die. If he does not give me the cash, I will kill him by inches."

"I should like to help you."

"By all means. Let it be an assisting game. Come with me and share the proceeds."

"Willingly. You are the sort of man I like to meet with."

"Oh! I am right enough when you know me and treat me well."

"That I am sure to do."

"I believe you. We have met before, and I don't think you are a man of a quarrelsome disposition."

"True. I can be a good friend and a strong hater at the same time. For you, amity—for Harkaway, hatred to the end."

"Bravo! I love a good hater!" cried Irrosk.

"In me you find one," replied Hunston.

"We have met before. St. Peter! We are not mere acquaintances of yesterday."

"Indeed, no."

"Join me in a glass of vodka and a caviar sandwich. We will lunch. Nicholai will be here directly if he follows my instructions."

"Can you trust him?"

"With my life, I reckon."

Irrosk explained to him his plan of action in regard to Young Jack, and the part that Nicholai, the traitor, was to play in it.

It sounded like a romance.

But it was not so.

The plot was a bitter reality in all its revolting details.

Jack was to be sacrificed for two reasons.

The greed for gold in Irrosk for the first part, and the hate of Hunston for the second.

Lunch was ordered and spread out on a small table, at which both sat down.

First came a dish of oysters, then caviar, which is the roe of that king fish, the sturgeon. This was followed by broiled chickens, stewed pigeons and mushrooms, lobster salad, olives and wine.

Neither Irrosk nor Hunston ever spared money when it was a question of gratifying their appetites.

Epicures they both were.

Their motto was this:

Be happy while you can.

If in full strength and health why not enjoy yourself.

You cannot live forever. You may grow old, but you may die young. In the midst of life we are in death. Here to-day and gone to-morrow. Illness may befall us. If we have the sense of taste, let us pamper the appetite. Why should we live on bread and water when we can afford to buy champagne and turtle. Can a man take his money to the grave? Enjoy the day, to the winds with to-morrow.

Sufficient for the day was the evil thereof.

Scarcely had they finished their lunch than Nicholai made his appearance.

He was a little old man, dressed in the attire of an ordinary citizen in decorous black clothes, and a fur cap with ear-muffs.

His manner was civil, almost cringing, and he looked as if he could eat as much humble pie as you liked to subject him to.

The word coward was written on his paper-colored face.

Any student of human nature, character reader, or physiognomist could read him.

He was stamped "traitor."

There was a slinking, hang-dog look about him; he could not look you in the face.

The fact was he was a jail-bird.

He had been ten years in a Russian prison for theft, and he had upon him the peculiar shirking, tired expression that characterizes everyone who has been behind the iron bars.

"Take a seat, my man!" exclaimed Hunston.

"No," interposed Irrosk, "I do not associate with fellows like this."

"What then?"

"I employ them, and if they do not obey my orders they find themselves in the wrong box mighty quick."

"Ah, I see; he is a servant."

"Call him a serf. I cannot make him my equal, for, believe me, I am particular in my choice of friends."

"Pardon me; you are right and I am wrong," answered Hunston.

Nicholai bowed with his usual subservience and smiled, as if he felt highly honored by the casual notice of such a man as the police spy.

"Any report to make?" asked Irrosk.

"Yes, sir," replied Nicholai. "The band meet to-night as usual under the presidency of Michelvitch."

"Ha! is he to the fore again?"

"He is."

"I count that man the most dangerous in Russia to-day. My net has many meshes. We shall have a good haul."

"Will your net be big enough for your fish?"

"You will see ere the clock strikes twelve this night," Irrosk replied.

"Good!" said Hunston. "I wish you success in all your undertakings."

Irrosk plied Nicholai with a variety of questions.

To these the traitor gave categorical answers.

He supplied the names of all the Nihilists who were expected to be at the club in River street that evening at eight.

These names Irrosk put down in a note book.

"That will do for the present," said Irrosk; "later on you can go to Harkaway and take him to the club."

"Do you think he will accompany me?"

"Why not?"

"He may smell a rat."

"Not at all. He is daring and fearless of results. More than that, he is enthusiastic in what he calls the cause of humanity. Ask him and he will go right enough."

"It may be so. I will do my best endeavor, your honor," replied Nicholai.

"That means that you will be successful. If not, look out for yourself."

This threat alarmed Nicholai.

It meant that he would be sent to Siberia with the chain gang.

This prospect terrified him.

"I will do it, sir, come what may," he said. "The force of my eloquence may not be persuasive, but if Harkaway will not listen to one pretense I will get him there on another; trust me."

"He dines at six. Call about seven and conduct him to the meeting."

"It shall be done, most worthy sir."

"Half an hour later I will raid the place and arrest everyone present."

"There will be fighting."

"What does that matter. I shall come prepared. The house will be carefully watched and surrounded. Escape will be impossible, and these Nihilists shall be rendered harmless for a long time in the future."

Nicholai bowed.

He had received his instructions. There was nothing he had to wait for.

It was not likely that he could put himself on a level or an equality with his employer.

Irrosk's position was infinitely superior to his own.

He retired, cap in hand.

His favorite haunt was a low grog shop or gin mill in a side street.

Here he associated with congenial companions of the lowest class.

He had a few roubles to spend, as Irrosk kept him supplied with pocket money.

If Harkaway and the Nihilists were captured he was promised a position in the police force.

This would relieve him of great anxiety, as he had no trade to fall back upon.

He had been a thief all his life, most of which had been spent in prison.

There is an old adage that it is never too late to mend.

But in the cases of some people, vicious, hardened criminals, permanent reform has been found impossible.

It was so with Nicholai.

He was nothing if not wicked. The original sin in him would come out in some shape or another, and often at the most unexpected times.

There was a small back room. In it were seated half a dozen bearded men, with villainous countenances.

Everyone had his portrait in the rogues' gallery.

The secret police knew that they congregated in this particular tavern, but did not rout them out.

It did not suit their purpose to interfere with them, and for this reason:

If the thieves were scattered about, it would be difficult to find them.

Concentrated in a particular location, if a crime of robbery on a large scale was perpetrated, they knew where to put their hands on the suspected persons.

Nicholai had one particular crony named Ivan. They had been in prison together.

Many a robbery had they planned and executed.

"I am promised a good berth," said Nicholai, "for certain services I am going to render to headquarters."

"What are they?" asked Ivan.

"That must remain a secret for the present. It will all come out in time."

"Oh! I don't want to fish. If I am not worthy of confidence——"

"I didn't say that; far from it," interposed Nicholai. "You are my best friend, but on this deal my lips for a few hours are sealed."

"If you could only obtain me a respectable, well paid position, I should not care."

"You! Why, you would not keep it for a month."

"I hope I know myself better than to lose it. That vodka you are drinking is too strong a poison. It does not agree with you at all."

"How about yourself, my fine fellow?"

There was every prospect of a row between the two rascals, but it was averted.

A waiter appeared with a couple of basins of excellent soup, and a pack of cards.

They ate the soup, and afterwards played cards for kopecks; more vodka was produced and consumed. Their tempers improved.

It was past six when Nicholai left the tavern; he promised Ivan that he would do all he could to obtain employment for him. If Irrosk took him to Siberia, he would try to get some place in the retinue for his friend.

They thought they would be very comfortable on Irrosk's staff, wherever he might go.

It was fully seven o'clock when the sneak, Nicholai, arrived at the Hotel Shonvaloff.

Young Jack had finished dinner, and was in the smoking room.

With him was Harry Girdwood.

"I am going out for an hour or two," remarked Jack.

"Theater or party?" asked Harry.

"Neither."

"What then, may I inquire?"

"I have engaged the services of a trampish sort of fellow to take me to a meeting of Nihilists to-night. I want to gain some knowledge of their aspirations, plans and organization."

"Are you not afraid of the secret police?"

"What can they do to me?"

"A great deal of inquiry."

"I do not belong to the society at all."

"Being found with them would go against you strongly. The circumstance would be suspicious."

"You always were girlish, Harry. Shadows frighten you; but I would go on if there were lions in my path," young Jack pluckily replied.

"Remember the city we are living in and the government we are under."

"They cannot hunt a British subject."

"My dear fellow," urged Harry, "they don't care what flag you sail under."

"Let them dare to lay a hand on me."

"They will do it, sure."

"England will protect her subjects in whatever country they may be found."

"Don't let that idea run away with your vivid imagination. England has her hands full and dare not provoke a war, unless it is with a lot of unarmed biggers in India or Africa."

"You've a poor idea of your country."

"It's a true one. Don't go to this meeting to-night. Just stay where you are. If you don't, the probabilities are we shall not see you again."

"Should I be such a loss?"

"Dear old boy, how can you ask such a question?" replied Harry Girdwood. "We should all droop without you. Mole would dwindle, Monday have a fit, Clara go crazy, and I——"

"What would you do?"

"Start out in search, and never rest till I had found you," was the answer.

"At all events I am going to the Nihilist meeting at Rescue Lodge, No. 10 River street."

"Under the guidance of Nicholai?"

"Yes."

"A man you know absolutely nothing about."

"He called on me," said Jack, "and offered his services, having heard that I sympathized with the Nihilist cause."

"How should he have known that?" inquired Harry. "Ask yourself. Where did he get his information. He is a Monchard, an agent provocateur, as the French term it."

"No, no!"

"I thought I saw Hunston to-day on the bank of the Neva," continued Harry.

"It is not likely."

"I assert that this is a put up job, and that Nicholai is employed to lure you to your ruin."

"You forget that I often talk to strangers in this very room after dinner about the infamies of the Russian officials. That is how Nicholai heard of and why he sought me."

"You won't listen to reason."

At this juncture Nicholai entered the apartment and advanced towards them.

"I am at your service, sir," he exclaimed. "You were kind enough to employ me for a certain service."

"That is understood," replied Jack.

He rose and put on his sealskin coat, which had cost him two thousand roubles.

It was a magnificent specimen of Alaska seal.

His head was covered with a hat in the conical Persian style, made of the finest astrachan.

"Good-bye, Jack," said Harry Girdwood; "I don't suppose I shall see you at breakfast to-morrow morning anyway."

"Why not?"

"The enemy will corral you."

"If so, I have you at my back."

"By Heaven, Jack, I will never desert you whatever happens."

"Don't I know that. It is a cold day when either of us are left."

They shook hands and Jack quitted the room with Nicholai.

Harry Girdwood was left alone.

He knew perfectly well that Jack was going to get into trouble.

But if he did he would help him out at all hazards.

The street was very dark and badly lighted. The snow fell heavily, the wind howled round the eaves of the houses, and a thoroughbred Russian night set in.

Nicholai knew his way.

He left the big thoroughfares and dived into little side streets which had devious and tortuous windings.

The wind blew into their faces and dashed the snow at them in a reckless fashion which is a specialty of Boreas, the king of the north wind.

At length they arrived at No. 10 River street. All was quiet as death.

The people living in the vicinity had shut themselves in from the inclement weather.

They were enjoying themselves over the stove, eating sausages and dried beef, which they washed down with bad beer and worse vodka.

Tobacco of the strongest kind was always in request.

"Here we are, sir!" exclaimed Nicholai in a whisper.

"Is this the house where the secret meetings are held among the Nihilists?" asked Jack.

"The same."

"Have they been here long?"

"Only for a few weeks. It is impossible to stay in any place more than a month or two. The police get wind of us and we are carted away to Siberia; but if they capture twenty men, forty, young and old, spring up in their place."

"Do you think Nihilists will be lasting?" asked Jack eagerly, for he wanted to know the whole truth.

"Not successful for a time, but it is a smouldering fire. The embers are always kindled. It only requires a breath of wind to fan it into flame."

"And then——"

"There will be an end to the great Russian Empire, which will become Kossack or republican."

"How long will that take?"

"I give it to the end of the century, not much longer," said Nicholai.

He knocked at the door.

It was a peculiar rap. One—two. One—two—three.

Not masonic, but one invented by the Nihilists as their own peculiar signal.

This was responded to from within.

The door was opened cautiously about two inches and a voice said, "anak!"

Possibly this had some reference to anarchy.

The response from outside was poetical.

"Shakespeare!"

The inner guard said "Rex!"

This ended the ceremony, and the two candidates for admission were allowed to enter.

The hall was only dimly lighted.

They walked across, traversed a long passage, and at last came to a large extension room, in which fifteen men were seated, smoking and talking eagerly.

Michelvitch was the leader, and he was seated in a high chair on a dais at the end of the hall.

The members of this secret society were grouped around the room.

All wore long black gowns and masks of the same color.

The lamps were turned half down, producing a dim, religious sort of light.

Very ghostly and blood curdling was the whole concern.

Nicholai and Young Jack took two vacant seats.

An attendant handed them a robe each, and a mask, which they put on.

The chairman grasped a gavel and knocked three times for order.

Everyone paid attention.

But before the proceedings could begin a noise was heard downstairs.

The front door was being beaten in.

Axes were used.

Fierce cries and oaths arose.

The next moment there was a rush, and the hall of the Nihilists was full of police.

They were in uniform and armed to the teeth.

At their head was Irrosk.

"Surrender!" he cried. "Give in to the law and obey the orders of the Czar!"

Jack jumped up and faced him boldly.

"If not, what then?" he demanded.

"Death!" replied Irrosk.

Jack raised his hand, in which was a pistol.

Irrosk was too quick for him.

With a blow from the flat of his sword, he knocked him senseless on the floor.

The Nihilists surrendered quietly.

Irrosk and the police were masters of the situation.

CHAPTER II.

THE ARREST OF YOUNG JACK AT THE SECRET MEETING OF THE RESCUE LODGE—NIHILISTS SURPRISED—DEPORTATION TO SIBERIA.

THE Nihilist lodge was full.

All the members were assembled in conclave.

The proceedings opened with prayer to the most high.

Although they wished for a new form of government, they were strictly religious.

In fact, their ceremonies corresponded to a great extent with those of lodges of free and accepted masons.

In their black cloaks and masks they looked very grim and awe-inspiring.

Before the president on a table was a large open bottle, and near that a death's head and crossbones.

Over his head were a couple of swords, crossed.

The gas lights in the room were half down.

A dim religious kind of light pervaded the large hall.

Jack, who sat by the side of his guide, Nicholai, was deeply impressed.

He felt that these men were in earnest.

They had a purpose in life.

This was to overthrow the monarchy and establish a republic in Russia.

If they could not get a republic they wanted autonomy.

Representative government had been denied them too long.

These noble and free-hearted patriots were willing to sacrifice everything for the good of their beloved country and countrymen.

It was a hard battle to fight.

Yet in spite of gigantic difficulties they hoped to be able to succeed in the long run.

Friends, relations near and dear, had been transported to the wilds of Siberia.

The chances were that they would never be seen again by those who loved them.

Life was short in the penal servitude of the far East. If the bad food and the climate did not kill the convicts the hard labor in the mines did.

It was short work with the young.

What was it with the middle-aged and the old!

They fell like leaves in the fall when the autumn winds blow hard and cold.

The master of the Lodge offered up a prayer for the liberation of the people from a galling, oppressive rule. Scarcely had he finished than a battering at the door began.

Every Nihilist started to his feet.

There was no possible means of escape.

They were surprised by the secret police.

That was everyone's opinion.

The next minute the door was banged down and the police rushed in.

Revolvers were in their hands; no resistance was made, and the whole party were captured.

Jack laughed at this incident.

He was only a visitor, and thought nothing could happen to him.

In this belief he was greatly mistaken.

He saw the form of Irrosk in full uniform. This gave him the idea of a plot.

Had he been led into a trap?

It looked like it, and his heart sank within him.

Michelvitch and his confederates were manacled together and marched to the fortress.

This was the strongest prison in St. Petersburg.

It was built on the bank of the river Neva, and frowned on the dark river in a gloomy manner.

Many an aching heart and wasted body did that extensive fortress hold.

All the prisoners had been taken away except Young Jack Harkaway.

He was held by two police officers as if he was a common Monjick.

Prince Komeski, dressed in the uniform of an officer of the Imperial guard, entered.

He advanced to the end of the room where the president had sat.

Taking the chair he beckoned to Irrosk.

"Bring up the prisoner," he said.

"Is it your highness' pleasure to try him here?" asked Irrosk.

"Yes," was the reply, "and sentence him, too. The others we know well. They have been under supervision for some time. This young man is a stranger, and must give an account of himself—good, bad or indifferent."

Young Jack was marched up to the desk.

Policemen, armed to the teeth, stood on each side of him.

A sergeant with a drawn sword took up a position behind him.

Irrosk assumed the role of accuser.

As for Nicholai, he was nowhere to be seen.

The wretched spy and traitor had vanished when the raid was made.

His dirty work was done.

He had nothing more to do with this tragedy in real life, and knew that the reward of his perfidy was sure.

"Your name?" demanded the chief of police, Prince Komeski, in a harsh, stony, mechanical tone of voice.

Although a nobleman, he was a policeman, every inch of him.

"Jack Harkaway, London, England—a British subject," was the answer.

"Where is your passport?"

"At my hotel—the Shonvaloff. It was vised by the British ambassador at Constantinople, and I was allowed to cross the frontier."

"We have only your word for that."

"If you do not believe me," replied Jack, indignantly, "send to the hotel for my friends, Mr. Mole and Mr. Harry Girdwood."

"I shall act as I please about that."

"Have I not a right to demand that such a thing should be done?"

"No. I am master here. Not you. Let me ask you a question. Are you aware that this room is the secret meeting place of a lodge of Nihilists?"

"Oh, yes. I understood that before I came here."

"Then you have violated the law."

"In what way?" inquired Jack.

"I have a sworn deposition of a member of this fraternity, who declares that you are a member of the 'Rescue Lodge,' No. 71, of the Nihilist society."

"Whoever said so is an infernal liar."

"Hush!"

"Point him out and I will tell him so to his false face," confirmed Jack.

"Do not be violent and vituperative."

"I cannot help it."

"That will not do you any good."

"What does it matter to me whether it does or not. I must speak my mind if I die for it."

"Not before this court."

"Call yourself a court?" cried Jack, sarcastically. "I don't."

"Silence, prisoner!"

"I will not be quiet."

"Understand that I am Prince Komeski, Chief of the St. Petersburg police, and will not be trifled with."

"I don't care who the deuce you are, for I stand on my rights," answered Jack, boldly.

"Let us see if you have any. What is your business here? Are you traveling for pleasure, or on business?"

"Call it the latter if you like; I want to find out all I can about Nihilism and write a book on it."

The prince drew a deep breath.

He had a horror of reporters, journalists and literary men of all description.

The Russian papers were strictly gagged and under censorship.

Nothing was allowed to be printed unless it was approved of by the police bureau.

It may justly be called a "reptile" press, for everything was inspired by government officials.

The publishers were paid for circulating lies and suppressing the truth.

This was a horrible state of affairs.

But it is true to this day.

Russia is as far as ever from being a free country.

"Ah," exclaimed the prince, "a newspaper correspondent, I suppose?"

"Not at all. If I see or hear things authentic that are likely to interest the civilized world, I collate the materials."

"What then—you disseminate the news?"

"In book form. I have a publisher in London and another in New York."

"Is that why you came here?"

"Certainly."

"Don't believe a word of it!" cried the prince. "You are a spy and a vile traitor!"

"That I defy you to prove! I was introduced to this lodge by payment of a sum of money by a man named Nicholai. Where is he? Call him. He can corroborate my statement."

Irrosk interposed.

"There is no such person," he said.

"What!" cried Jack, in surprise.

"I repeat my statement—it is a pure invention."

Jack started.

"This is a conspiracy against me!" he cried, loudly. "I know this man! He is a bandit—a spy—a——"

"Stop your noise!" interposed Komeski.

"Am I not allowed to speak in my own defense?"

"Not at present."

"Why not?"

"I want to hear the evidence against you."

"If you will believe that fellow, you'll credit any liar and horse thief!"

"You are too fond of using that word."

"Well, well! Go on!" replied Jack.

He folded his arms and listened.

"What do you know about the prisoner at the bar?" inquired the prince.

"A good deal, your highness," answered Irrosk.

"Let me hear it. I want to know all I can; it is a serious case; does he belong to the red flag club of Paris, or the English and American socialist associations, the Whitechapel and Chicago progressives?"

"Perhaps. I know not."

"What do you allege?"

"Simply this," answered Irrosk. "I know that he has been fomenting discord in the Soudan, he has fought the bandits of the Balkans, and has come on here to do more mischief and stir up more mud."

"He is a dangerous character then?"

"One of the worst revolutionists the world has ever seen. Cast down society. Kill capital, root and branch. Destroy!"

"How are you going to build up again?"

"That is a question that these gentlemen of the pavement never give themselves time to think about."

"My opinion is that he requires time for reflection, and I will commit him to the fortress."

Jack became excited.

"I demand justice," he said.

"You have it."

"Let me have a fair trial in open court before a jury, and meanwhile admit me to bail."

"You are in Russia," said the prince.

"What difference does that make?"

"A good deal. Here we settle cases in a summary manner, and avoid trials and appeals."

"You refuse bail?"

"I do, and I sentence you here to penal servitude in the mines for life."

The Prince Komeski spoke in an arbitrary manner.

There was no gainsaying him.

He sat in the Judgment seat and his word was law.

"But I protest. This is horrible! Inhuman! Dreadful!" cried Jack.

"You place your head in the fire. Do you expect to get out without being burned?"

"Who said so?"

"I merely put the question to you. Solve the problem for yourself. You are no dunce," replied Komeski. "Sentence is passed. It is useless to bandy words!"

"If I had a pistol I would shoot you!"

"Possibly. When you were arrested you were disarmed."

"What have I to do with the Nihilist conspiracy?"

"Why are you found here in secret conclave with a nest of rank venomous political vipers?"

"I have explained that."

"Not to my satisfaction," replied the prince.

He motioned to the guards.

They promptly removed Young Jack, leaving Irrosk and Komeski together.

They handled Harkaway roughly.

He was treated as if he was one of the lowest criminals in the country.

It is a curious thing, but political prisoners, whether of high or low degree, are always treated worse than others in Russia.

A closed up carriage was in waiting.

He was bundled in like a bale of rags. His captors entered with him.

The huge clock of the church of St. Milhard and St. George rang out the hour.

Ten o'clock.

The snow was still falling heavily.

It was difficult for the heavy coach to get along.

At last the heavy gates of the prison of St. Peter and St. Paul were reached.

They opened wide to receive the victim of intrigue and oppression.

He was landed at the door. Warders took possession of him.

Cold as it was, he was cast into a cell on the ground floor with only one blanket to cover him.

The frost was very severe.

Jack shivered as he was thrust into the dungeon, and he cursed the Russians.

It is not nice, decorous or proper to curse any one. A good Christian is not expected to do anything of the kind.

Jack Harkaway, however, gave way to his innermost feelings.

"D—— the Russians!" he cried as he rolled himself up in a blanket.

The recording angel heard the words. He let fall a tear, and as soon as the entry was made in his ledger, the tear blotted it out forever.

This forcible expression of Jack's, though of course unpardonable, was natural under the circumstances.

He had not become a Nihilist.

Neither was he an openly avowed foe of the Czar of all the Russias.

When he reclined on the plank bedstead and wrapped himself up, he began to think.

The conclusion he came to was that he had been made the victim of a deep laid plot.

It was very cold.

He found it impossible to sleep, and the board he was lying on made every bone in his body ache.

There was no window.

The only light that illuminated the cell, came from a gas jet in the corridor.

This penetrated through the transom or ventilator over the door, a narrow grated aperture about half a foot wide.

"This takes the cake," muttered Jack, as his teeth chattered. "I came out as an interviewer to have a good time, and get materials for a Nihilist book. How could I obtain pointers unless I went to headquarters? Instead of doing what I wanted, Russian tyranny has placed me here."

He raised his voice.

A sepulchral echo answered:

"Here!"

How the wretched night passed Jack scarcely knew.

There was nothing to eat or drink in the cell.

He was left entirely to himself.

Not a warder came near him to ask if he required anything, or if he was feeling ill.

He might have died for all they cared.

Such is the harsh discipline in Russian prisons.

At the Hotel Shonvaloff he had ordered a game champagne supper.

To this he was looking forward, but man proposes and God disposes.

Burns tells us that the plans of men and mice, gang aft a'glee.

This is Scotch and requires translating.

I have been in Scotland, and know the land of cakes from the border to the Hebrides, from Edinbro' to Aberdeen and beyond, so I can tell you that the shepherd poet meant to say that there is a hidden power that rules our destinies.

This doctrine may savor of fatalism, but there is more truth than poetry in the remark.

In the early morning he was roused from a broken slumber by the opening of the door.

He sprang up.

The blanket fell off his limbs to the concrete floor of the cell.

Before him stood his betrayer of the night before.

It was Nicholai, the traitor.

The dull, gray light of the morning made the cell look dim and misty.

Nicholai wore a smile on his face. In one hand he carried a large glass of brandy and milk. In the other a plate on which was a tenderloin steak, onions and bread, with the accompaniment of mustard and salt.

"Here is something, sir," he exclaimed, "which will do you good."

"You here?" cried Jack.

"I am very sorry for what happened last night."

"Infernal liar! You gave me away."

"No, sir. Nothing of the sort. It was accidental and unfortunate. Irrosk has spies. He got information of your movements, and——"

"That will do," Jack interrupted.

"But——"

"Dry up, you colossal, monumental liar. If you don't, upon my soul, I'll hit you."

"Don't do that. Drink this rum and milk, sir, I have brought you."

"Perhaps it is poison."

"No, indeed. I know the ways of this prison and have special privileges."

He spread out the breakfast on a stone slab.

Jack looked suspiciously upon it.

"Why are you allowed to bring me this?" he asked.

"I have a permit from Irrosk," replied Nicholai.

"He is my enemy."

"Never mind that," said Nicholai, with a knowing look.

"What do you imply?"

"There are wheels within wheels."

"I believe you have got wheels in your head. What do you know?"

"Eat—drink, and I will discourse sweet music in your ears."

Jack did so.

Prudence said, "Don't touch anything;" appetite said, "Indulge yourself."

The brandy and milk was strong; it warmed him to the marrow of his bones as if by a charm.

Rapidly the steak and onions disappeared down his throat as if he was a half famished wolf.

Wonderful fare was it for a Nihilist prisoner.

When he had finished, Jack said:

"Explain this generosity. There must be some hidden meaning in it."

"Irrosk is not so bad as you fancy him," replied Nicholai. "All he wants is money."

"Is that his game?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go on; let us hear all about it. I can see that you are his messenger; he has sent you."

"Rothschilds are your bankers in this city?"

"Wherever I go I bank with them or their agents, and my check is good for a million."

"Irrosk only asks for a check for one hundred thousand."

"Roubles?"

"No. English pounds in gold. If you consent to give him that you are free, and shall be escorted to the frontier."

Now Jack saw the artfulness of the whole arrangement.

All Irrosk wanted was to get money out of him and get rich at his expense.

"What's the alternative?" asked Jack, after a moment's reflection.

"Say 'yes' or 'no' quick."

Jack answered with a decided negative.

Hearing this Nicholai bowed formally.

"It is now eight of the clock," he said; "at ten the chain gang starts for the convict settlements."

"And I——"

"You will join them in the tramp to the wilds of Siberia," answered Nicholai.

He retired.

The door was slammed with a bang and securely locked.

Jack sat on the side of the bed and gave himself up to reflection.

He could have parted with the money demanded, large as the sum was, without feeling any financial inconvenience or trouble.

At the same time he determined not to do it.

Demetrius, the bandit of the Balkans, had asked for the same terms.

Jack had refused.

The bandit had condemned him to death in default of payment.

But he had used his wits and escaped.

If he could get the best of a bandit, why should he not beat the Russian government.

In this frame of mind he waited until the guards came.

He was taken through the corridor into the yard of the big prison, which had for centuries echoed to the laments and moans of innumerable unfortunates.

Here on the hard, frozen snow, which prevailed everywhere from street to roof, were assembled thirty convicts.

Some were political convicts, others robbers, burglars and murderers.

There was no discrimination.

Everyone was treated in the same manner.

Jack was handcuffed to a burly ruffian of forty years of age, who had killed his man in a drunken row in a saloon.

The death sentence had been commuted.

He was condemned to the mines for life, but he did not seem to care in the least.

When the gang were manacled together they were standing two and two.

A thin chain was then attached to their legs so as to hold them together.

There was no possibility of any one of them escaping.

The gates of the prison were thrown wide open.

Two Cossacks headed the procession. Two more came behind.

But what astonished Jack, who was in the first row or rank, was this.

The leader or conductor, or the party riding on a bay-colored horse, was Nicholai.

He was the commander of the expedition.

It was early.

A dull haze hung over the city of the Czar.

The few people who were about, took little notice of the poor, forlorn prisoners.

They shrugged their shoulders.

"It is only the weekly chain gang for Siberia," the spectators muttered.

And they passed on.

It was no uncommon spectacle in St. Petersburg, any more than a patrol wagon in New York, or a police van—called the "Black Maria," in the streets of London.

In less than an hour the chain gang were out of the city and on a country road.

Only a few carts met them. These contained vegetables, fruit, eggs, butter, poultry, etc., for the city trade.

The drivers scarcely turned their heads to look at the chain gang.

What did it matter to them?

They were convicted of some offense against the law.

Goodness only knew what.

Little did it matter to these simple country folk; all they wanted was to get a living, eat well, get drunk when they were not busy, smoke black tobacco and bless the Czar, whom they called their father.

There was no halt till midday.

Then they came to a police barracks where the convicts were permitted to rest and feed in a wooden shed, warmed by a large stove.

They had not been treated well during the march, for the Cossacks were armed with short handled, long lashed whips.

If any one in the chain gang halted or lingered, the whip soon coiled round his back.

This woke the laggard up.

Black bread, hard cheese and weak tea was served to them.

The man, Rewski, to whom Young Jack Harkaway was chained, seemed perfectly at ease.

"This is a nice change," he remarked. "I like the open air and the country."

"So do I under certain conditions," replied Jack, with a half smile.

"What are you sent up for?"

"Nothing at all, that I know of."

"Come! Come! That won't do," said Rewski. "What is it, robbery, arson, or——"

"What are you talking about? I am suspected of Nihilism."

"That is what I thought," replied Rewski. "I'm in for murder. I killed my man for fooling round my girl. You look just the respectable, conscientious fool that would be a Nihilist."

"Why not?"

"Bah! what do you get out of it? If you rob you chance something. If you kill you have satisfaction, but Nihilism!—oh! saints help us! There is nothing in it! You risk all for a fallacy—a mere dream."

"Is it nothing to endeavor to regenerate a country and overthrow the worst kind of tyranny?"

"What do you expect to get if you succeed?"

"The applause and gratitude of future generations," replied Jack.

"Rubbish! humbug!" said the murderer, Rewski, "that will not fill your pockets."

"What would Europe be to-day were it not for men like Mazzini, Konuth, Garibaldi, Toussaint, L'ouverture and George Washington, who worked in their sphere for the good of the people at large?"

Rewski smiled.

"You're a crank," he remarked. "I can't talk to you. Have an onion; it will go well with your bit of cheese."

He had half an onion which he couldn't consume. If he had been able to do so the probability is that he would not have given it away. Presently a horn sounded.

It was the signal for the chain gang to rise and resume their march along the frosted roads.

The crack of the whips was heard.

All fell in.

Young Jack Harkaway was traveling to the wilds of Siberia.

CHAPTER III.

JACK'S FRIENDS ARE PUZZLED.

It may be easily imagined that when Jack did not return to supper, which was ordered and on the table at half-past eleven, his friends were quite alarmed.

Where could he be?

That was the all absorbing question which vexed them.

No solution was forthcoming.

Neither Clara nor Harry Girdwood had the least appetite under the circumstances. They drank a glass of wine and consulted together.

Mr. Mole and Monday, however, allowed nothing to interfere with their digestion.

They partook heartily of the delicacies displayed before them, and made no apology.

Twelve o'clock struck.

There were no signs of Young Jack.

"Really," exclaimed Clara, tearfully, "this is becoming very serious."

"Jack has fallen into some trouble," replied Harry.

"I begged him not to go."

"So did I."

"But he would have his own way; he is so willful," continued Clara.

"You married an adventurous husband, and have to put up with the consequences. There is little doubt in my mind that he is in a straight place; what I should call nicked in a cleft stick."

"How can we extricate him?"

"I can't tell until to-morrow."

"Is it too late to act to-night?" inquired Clara.

"Of course it is," answered Harry. "Where can I go at this hour, tell me?"

"To the British Embassy."

"If I was received, what information could they give me?"

"Try the police bureau."

Harry laughed at this idea.

"Don't be so foolish," he said. "Is it likely that the Russian police would give themselves away? If they have made Jack a prisoner they will keep him."

"What will become of him?"

"Deportation to Siberia will be his portion."

"A living death."

"Yes; there is no other way of describing it," replied Harry, solemnly. "A prisoner in those wilds might as well be in the grave."

"How shall we find out where he is? Some effort must be made on his behalf."

"Certainly. I will leave no stone unturned, and the grass shall not grow under my feet."

"Assure me of that."

"My dear Mrs. Harkaway, I do honestly and truly. Jack is my oldest and best friend. I may say my only one."

"I shall sit up all night."

"And I will have a nap in a chair. He may come in. I don't say he will, but he may."

"God grant it," sighed Clara.

She put some wraps round her and reclined on the sofa. Harry lighted a cigar and leant back in a chair.

Mole and Monday were playing cards.

They did not attach much importance to Jack's absence.

In fact they were used to that kind of thing.

He was in the habit of disappearing without any warning and turning up in the same sudden manner.

"That a queer start about Marse Jack," said Monday. "What him up to now, I wonder?"

"Oh," replied Mole, "it is one of his usual rackets. I expect he will fill our rooms with Nihilists and we shall all be arrested."

"If they lock this chile up, there'll be a camp meeting in the house."

"They will make no distinction."

"Why not? They can't accuse me of conspiring, sah," said Monday.

"You are able bodied. The authorities will be sure to have you. I am one-legged and should be no good to them or anybody."

"Yah! Yah!" laughed Monday.

"What are you grinning at, you silly ape?" asked Mole.

"They kill you right off," replied Monday. "I'm to get you out of the way—that for suah."

"Kill me! How dare they?"

"Wooden leg professors of no account out heah—generally fill up an odd corner of the cemetery with them."

Mole threw down his cards.

"Insolent as usual!" he exclaimed. "I shan't play with you any more!"

"Pay up then," said Monday. "You owe me forty-five roubles on the game."

"How's that?"

"Dis nigger keep account with pencil and bit of paper, sah."

"It's a mistake; you're cheating!"

"Say that again, sah, and me punch um nose," cried Monday, threateningly.

"At all hazards I repeat the allegation. Great is the truth, and it shall prevail."

"What am I?"

"A common cheat—a card-stacker—a bunco man," replied Mole.

The next moment Monday, the Prince of Limbi, was upon him.

He was wild with rage.

Seizing Mole by the nose, which was a prominent feature, he lifted him from his chair and ruthlessly dragged him round the room.

"Hi! hi! stop it," yelled the professor. "Hi! hi! hi! drop it, you beast!"

Monday gave the nose an extra twist.

Then he pushed him against the wall, where he held him as firmly as in a vise.

"What am I?" he demanded. "What you call dis colored genelman?"

Mole had endured enough of it.

"You're all right," he replied. "I was only joking. Can't you stand a little fun?"

"Not ob that sort. You go little too far. I can't stand it, but I let you go this time."

"That's a good fellow. A nose is a sensitive organ, you know," said Mole.

"I nebber had mine pulled as well as I remember."

"A nigger is only sensitive in the shins. If you want to cow a black, hit him on the shin."

Monday let him go.

In a moment Mr. Mole picked up a large bamboo cane.

It was one he was in the habit of carrying when out walking, to steady himself with.

He gave Monday a couple of blows on the shins with it.

This caused him to fall on the floor, writhing with pain.

"Let up, Massa Mole," he cried. "What you want to hit a poor colored man like that for?"

"It's your own fault," answered the professor.

"Let up, I telling you."

"Didn't you ask for it by tweaking my nose? Make an apology or I'll do it again."

"Yes, sah. You're a perfect genelman and no mistake. I respect you. Nebber saw any one I liked better."

"That will do. I am satisfied. You can rise."

Monday did so, and was glad to quit the room.

"The black skunk!" said Mole, "I've taught him a lesson he won't forget in a hurry."

He sat down and was soon fast asleep.

Early in the morning Harry Girdwood woke up.

Clara was in a sweet slumber.

He did not rouse her.

She was worn out with anxiety and fatigue.

The snow storm had ceased when he left the hotel, but the frost was intense.

He was well wrapped up, and his rubber shoes prevented him from slipping.

A directory had supplied him with the name and address of a private detective.

The building was not far off.

When he reached it, he went up to the third floor in the elevator.

Walking along the corridor he saw the name:

"KREMLIN, Private Detective."

Opening the door he found a man seated at a desk.

He was short and thin. His hair was dark and curly.

The nose was prominent, the chin narrow, the eyes red, rolling, restless, like those of a ferret.

This man was the most prominent detective in St. Petersburg, and frequently employed by the secret police.

He was well known.

The secrets of the best families in the city were in his hands.

Banks employed him to find out clerks who were robbing them, and he was engaged in all the divorce cases.

His knowledge of law was equal to that of the best legal men.

Harry Girdwood gave him his card.

The detective fixed his piercing eyes upon him.

So steadfast was his gaze that Harry felt uneasy.

"Your business with me?" exclaimed Kremlin.

"I want to find out something," replied Harry.

"You have come to the right man."

"What is your fee?"

"Five thousand roubles. I never undertake a case for less. The Russian roubles are worth, nominally, two shillings."

Taking out his check book, Harry wrote out a draft for the amount.

"Now, what is it?" asked Kremlin. "Be brief."

"I will."

"Excuse me, but my time is valuable."

"Listen," said Harry. "My friend, Jack Harkaway, who is a rich man, came here to study Nihilism and write a book."

"Foolish!"

"Last night he went to the Rescue Lodge in River street, and he has not been heard of or seen since."

"Who was his introducer?" asked Kremlin.

"A fellow who calls himself Nicholai."

"A police spy. I know him well."

"Will you find out for me what has become of Harkaway?" continued Harry.

"In half an hour."

"Shall I wait here, or go back to my hotel and return?"

"Stay where you are," answered Kremlin. "I will lock you in—await me."

"I will."

Kremlin stirred up the stove, put on his overcoat and his sealskin cap.

"Will you be long?" asked Harry.

"As I said—half an hour."

"Then I shall know all particulars."

"Undoubtedly. I never fail," replied Kremlin.

He left the office and locked the door. Half an hour passed quickly.

At the promised time Kremlin came back looking stern, earnest and full of business, as he always was.

There was no sentiment about him.

He never laughed—he rarely smiled.

"Well," ejaculated Harry.

"It is not well for your friend; it is bad," replied the detective.

"How do you mean?"

"The Nihilist club you mentioned was raided last night by Prince Komeski in person; he is at the head of the secret police."

"What about Harkaway?"

"He was captured with the rest of the conspirators, and transported with the chain gang that left St. Petersburg this morning to march to Siberia."

"His destination?"

"Is Irkutsk. A man named Irrosk has a spite against him."

"Ah! I see now!"

"Irrosk is appointed governor of Irkutsk, and I fear your friend will have a hard time of it."

"God help him," said Harry Girdwood.

"I echo that, although I do not know him."

"If you had the pleasure—I may say the honor of his acquaintance—you would find him a generous, large-hearted, whole-souled gentleman."

"That makes no difference."

"Why?"

"He is in the grip of the law," replied Kremlin.

"Is there any way of rescuing him?"

"None that I can see of."

"Can Mrs. Harkaway and I travel to Irkutsk?"

"Why not? The country is open to travelers. You can go to Greenland or the North Pole."

"I don't want to go as far as that. Besides, I might never get there!"

"No one has succeeded yet. It will be done some day."

"What will be the result?"

"Barren," replied Kremlin. "With pack ice blocking the whole way, what is the use of a north-west passage if you find it? Answer that question."

"There may be an open Polar Sea and a land with some amount of fertility."

"Dreams! Ice everywhere—all ice! If you wish to go after your friend, well and good! The railway will take you a certain distance."

"After that?"

"You must travel on a sleigh."

"Is it far?"

"Oh, a long, long way! But there are road houses where you can stop and be accommodated."

"That is all we want."

"Good-morning!" said Kremlin, abruptly.

The interview was over.

Harry knew the fate of his friend.

Jack's rash philanthropy had caused him to be sent with a gang of convicts to the wilds of Siberia.

He was a slave to all intents and purposes.

Leaving Kremlin's office, he returned to the hotel.

Clara, Mole and Monday were sitting down to breakfast *a la Russe*.

The table was well-spread, and all kinds of good things were displayed on a sideboard.

If you did not like one thing, you could help yourself to another.

"Oh, Harry!" cried Clara, "I am so glad to see you. We all thought you were lost."

"Not much," replied Harry.

"Sit down and have a cup of tea!"

"I will with pleasure."

"And tell me the news. I know you have been exploring after poor Jack."

"You are right," replied Harry Girdwood. "I have found out all about him through the medium of a private detective, but I fear the news will alarm you."

"I am prepared for the worst," said Clara, with a look of resignation.

"Are you sure?"

"Don't I know what Jack is? He's a source of great trouble to me through his adventurous disposition, much as I love him."

"Hear the melancholy truth. Jack was arrested last night with the Nihilists."

"I thought as much."

It was through the malevolence of Irrosk."

"That scoundrel has been a thorn in his path for some long time past."

"Yes, indeed."

"But we will soon get him out of prison, will we not?" said Clara, hopefully.

"He is not in the city."

"How is that?"

"He was deported this morning with the weekly chain gang to Siberia."

"The ambassador will help us."

"No assistance is to be expected from that source. He was caught red-handed at a Nihilist secret meeting," replied Harry Girdwood.

"What is the sentence?"

"Penal servitude for life in the mines."

Clara burst into a torrent of tears.

This terrible news was more than she could bear.

In vain Harry tried to comfort her.

Her grief was painful to witness.

"Be brave!" exclaimed Mole. "It is a long lane that has no turning."

"I cannot be pacified," she sighed.

"Wait till the clouds roll by, missy," said Monday, "after the storm comes the calm."

"I wish I could think so. There is no rest or peace of mind for me henceforth."

"Heaven tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," continued Mole.

"We will fight for Jack."

"Against the Russian government, which is the most despotic in the world?"

"Yes; against fifty governments, if necessary."

"Where has he gone?" asked Clara, addressing Harry Girdwood.

"To a town called Irkutsk," answered he. "It is a center of mining."

"What kind of mines?"

"Quicksilver."

"I have read about them. They are deadly. Two or three years is as long as a man can exist in them."

"He will not be there as many weeks," said Harry, "if I can get at him."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Go after him. He is in danger, for Irrosk is appointed Governor of Irkutsk."

"Is that so?"

"I should not wonder if Hunston was not at the back of Irrosk when this took place."

"Hunston wants to get money out of Jack," remarked Mr. Mole.

"Oh, yes! We know that," rejoined Harry. "It is a plot. I did not like that fellow Nicholai from the first."

"He was the decoy duck."

"This country seems to be full of spies and intrigues."

"It is the way it is ruled. Spies in the drawing-rooms, the universities, the palace—everywhere."

"How detestable!"

"Never mind. We shall get the best of it. Irkutsk is a large town. We will all start for it to-morrow."

"How long will it take Jack to reach there?"

"A month, probably, at the rate the gang goes."

"Then we shall be ahead of him?"

"No matter. We shall have time to look round."

"What do you intend to do?" inquired Clara.

"Wait the course of events. Watch and pray. Hope for the best. Seize an opportunity when it offers," Harry answered, cheerfully.

"We shall be on the scene anyway," remarked Mole, putting some brandy in his tea.

"Yah, yah!" laughed Monday.

"Have you seen your reflection in the glass? Does it make you smile?" asked Mole.

"A lot of good you'll be to Marse Jack," retorted Monday, sarcastically.

"I am not too old to strike a blow."

"With um wooden leg! Golly, what a blow it would be, sah!"

"I can shoulder a musket and handle a sword!"

"You're thinking of the past."

"I have killed hundreds in my time."

"Gettin' an ole man now."

"So are you, dinky."

"Come outside in the snow and see which is the best man?"

"Done with you, and I'll bet I come out first."

"How much you wager?"

"Twenty roubles."

"Plank down your money and let Marse Harry be stake-holder."

"Here's mine—cover it."

Mole handed the requisite amount to Girdwood.

In a moment Monday did the same, and they quitted the room together.

Harry and Clara went to the window.

They wanted to see the fun.

And fun it was.

Their coats were tightly buttoned, and they had on fur caps. There was little or no traffic just then, so they got off the sidewalk and stepped into the street. Mole was placed at a disadvantage owing to his wooden leg. This support became firmly imbedded in the snow. "Now for a good wrestle, Cornish style," cried Monday; "catch as catch can."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Mole.

"What's the matter now, sah? Anything wrong?"

"My leg is stuck fast."

"I can't help that. Not this chile's fault."

"I'm handicapped; give me time to get on the pavement."

"That wasn't in the agreement," replied Monday; "look for an engine on a bust. I'se comin' like a big steam roller."

"Play fair."

Mole's remonstrances were fruitless. The next moment Monday was upon him. He clasped him round the waist with the hug of a grizzly bear. Mole got hold of him round the neck. They struggled together and fell down in the snow, Mole being underneath. He was rolled unmercifully in the snow. It got into his ears and mouth. "I give in!" he yelled.

"Who's de bes' man?" asked Monday. "Make your confession, or I smother you, suah!"

"You are," answered Mole. "I own up that I am licked; it's your victory!"

Magnanimously Monday assisted him to rise. He shook the snow off his garments, sneezed three times, and said: "Let's take a drink."

"I shake hands on that, sah," replied Monday.

They adjourned to the cafe, and ordered hot brandy and water. "Now, Massa Mole, you drink my health, and sing the Conquering Hero Comes," said Monday.

"I am sure I shall not do anything of the kind," replied the professor.

"Didn't me beat you fair and square?"

"Not by any manner of means!"

"How you gwine to prove that?"

"You got me foul, because my leg stuck. That was the cause of my defeat, you sable fraud!"

"I wrestle you ober again; double or quits!"

"No, you won't; I've had enough for one day. Your society is undesirable."

"Then you neen't keep it."

"I don't intend to."

Rising, Mole waved his hand.

"Pay for the drinks!" he exclaimed, walking away.

"Hi!" cried Monday, who was rather stingy, "none ob your larks. You order them. Why I pay for you?"

"Settle," replied Mole.

"Not me. You don't get no bulge on this nigger."

"You'll have to whether you like it or not."

"I won't on de principle ob de thing. It am a robbery, sah."

"Take it easy."

"Come back, you dead beat."

"Shut your mouth, you crazy fool!"

Saying this Mr. Mole left the cafe, whistling, "It's O! to be a Gypsy and Camp Out in the Woods."

Monday was nearly speechless with rage when he saw the door close. The professor had disappeared. He was left to pay.

"The mean ole cuss," muttered Monday. "He's put me in a hole. This a high toned caravanserai. They have the cheek to charge a dollar a drink here."

A happy thought struck him.

"I'll tell the waiter to make out the bill and send it up to Massa Mole's room," he continued.

But he reckoned without his host. He could not speak a word of Russian.

"Ha! Ha!" he grinned. "I'll pay the ole fox. He doan't git the best of this coon."

At this juncture the waiter who had attended upon them came up. In his hand he had a small piece of paper.

It was the bill, the amount of payment being eight roubles.

"All right," said Monday. "Charge it to Mr. Mole, Room 84 in this hotel."

The waiter made a reply. It sounded like, "Krackiterax Moleski."

"What the debble you saying?" cried Monday. "Don't you understand plain English, you dunder-headed son-of-a-gun, eh?"

"Markiti prov salami," the waiter appeared to answer, angrily.

"Go to Amsterdam, you Dutchman!" replied Monday.

The waiter again spoke.

"I don't understand your gibberish," continued Monday. "I'se gwine ter quit."

He walked to the door. It opened on the snow-clad street. Before he could clear the threshold, the waiter who had followed gave him a mighty kick. It struck him amidships as a sailor would say. Staggering across the sidewalk, Monday fell head first in the snow.

He was highly indignant. "Bless the Lord! I'll have revenge!" he shouted. He got up. A peal of derisive laughter rang in his ears. It came from Mole, who was standing near the hotel entrance. Something else came from the professor too. It was weak, perhaps, for the old man to indulge in such a boyish amusement, but he snowballed him. Monday, in the language of the playground, got it hot and strong. A well directed ball hit him on the left ear and banged it up. "Hi, ki!" he screamed. "What you a-doin' of, you ole blamed goat. I'll—"

His further utterance was cut short. Another ball entered his mouth and pretty nearly choked him. "Oh, Jemima!" said Mole. "Revenge is sweet! I do dearly love getting square with that black thief!"

Monday lost no time in retaliating. He began to pelt the professor with snowballs. One he threw had a lump of ice in it. The ball struck the professor on the nose, making it very sore. In an instant the blood began to flow. He retreated and sat down on the hotel stoop, which was soon ensanguined.

"Time!" he cried. "In all well regulated games time is called."

"Is it a fair knockout?" asked Monday.

"Yours was a very unfair kick out. How did you like it?" Mole replied.

"Not berry much, you ole skunk. What you add insult to injury for?"

"When a man's down, always kick him."

"You see me fired out; then you snowball me."

"A truce. I call a truce," said Mole; "let us shake hands."

"Pay for dem drinks inside."

"They are paid for by you, because the waiter took it out of you."

"Go 'long with your rubbish," cried Monday, "or we play ball again."

"I'll run, if I'm out on the first base," replied Mole.

He rose and entered the hotel, being followed by Monday, who was a sorer if not a wiser man. They had no time for further quarreling. It was necessary to pack up and make a few purchases previous to their departure next day for Siberia.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE WILDS—OUTBREAK OF CONVICTS.

YOUNG JACK arrived in due time at Irkutsk. It was a thriving, prosperous town. The population amounted to over a hundred thousand. It had plenty of shops, banks, and places of amusement. But only one paper. This was under official supervision. Not one line of politics was admitted. It was strictly prohibited. The commonest gossip was freely admitted to the columns of the Irkutsk "Courier."

But the outside world was a blank to them. They never knew what was going on in St. Petersburg or Europe, Asia, or in fact any part of the globe, except that where they resided. Why was this so?

The majority of the population were convicts who had been pardoned after serving a few years' sentence. This clemency was extended for good conduct. They were allowed to settle in the town. Also they could send for their wives and families, if they had any. Their friends were permitted to supply them with money. There was only one drawback. They were not allowed, under pain of death, to quit the reservation. Land could be bought and cultivated. In fact, every liberated convict received twenty acres as his own freehold. He could cultivate it as he chose. There was a good market for all he was able to produce. A fair profit followed in the wake of the sale. The mines were situated about a mile from the town. Barracks for the convicts were erected between the two on a healthy plain. They were capable of containing five thousand men. As a rule, they were nearly always full. There was, of late, a plethora of convicts. The master of the barracks was an old soldier named Kolinski. A fine, honest, straightforward fellow was Kolinski, who had shed his blood for his country. He had helped to win many a well fought field. But one arm was left to him. The other had been lost in action. Though the journey was a long and arduous one, Jack had not suffered much. Walking over the snowy steppes was exhilarating. It warmed his blood and stirred his brain. The only trouble he experienced was with his feet. He got footsore and he had chilblains.

When he reached Irkutsk he could scarcely crawl.

It was extremely likely that he would not have been able to walk another half dozen miles.

Often it happened with the chain gang that a man fell out of the ranks.

What then?

Is the life of a convict worth anything?

The guards uncoupled the poor wretch and left him lying on the snow to perish.

Perhaps he did not die that way.

Sometimes the tragedy assumed a more gory aspect.

A pack of wolves swept down upon the bleak and desolate steppe.

What was a human being speedily underwent a change of a curious kind.

It became a skeleton as the famished wolves tore the flesh from the bones.

To quench their thirst, they lapped the fast congealing blood.

This danger Jack had escaped.

There was no ill treatment in the barracks; the rooms were large.

Each contained fifty men.

Stoves gave out heat; the bed covering was sufficient; the convicts had a small allowance of tobacco.

The nicotine served as a sedative, and made the men to some extent comfortable.

They were more amenable to discipline.

The work in the mines was not particularly hard, each one having to work eight hours a day.

From daylight to dusk.

Say from eight to four o'clock in the afternoon.

Some of the men had dice, others greasy, well-thumbed and fingered packs of cards.

With these they amused themselves in the dormitories.

Bread and salt was freely supplied them, the tea was not bad, and the beef three times a week, stewed and baked, was palatable.

On Friday there was fish; on Sunday soup and a hodge-podge sort of pudding.

They conversed freely and were allowed to sing.

This was a privilege they often took advantage of.

It was funny to hear a sacred song in one part of the chamber.

In another a comic one, and sometimes one with a little profanity thrown in.

This, however, was instantly stopped if overheard by the attendant warders.

Kolinski went over all the wards once a day for inspection, and if any prisoners had a well founded complaint to make he listened to it.

Should a grievance exist he remedied it.

What a difference there was between Kolinski, prison master, and Moscovitch, master of mines.

The latter was cruel, rapacious, vindictive.

On the day after his arrival at Irkutsk, Jack was sent to the mines with Rewski.

He had been his traveling companion all the way.

Although he was a robber—a low, murdering bully—there was a genial, comical side to his character.

The convicts had to go down a shaft in a cage.

There were three levels in some, five in another, six in a third, and so on.

The older the mine the deeper the miners descended.

Fortunately they put Jack on a silver mine, which was not so injurious as the quicksilver ones.

The mercury arising from the latter was bad.

In fact, it was injurious in the extreme.

The insidious mercurial poison permeated the hot, confined atmosphere.

It entered the system and stayed there.

A man became salivated in six months, and a lingering death ensued.

Jack and Rewski were assigned to the fifty foot level of a new mine.

This was a great privilege.

They were highly favored, as the ventilation was good.

The warders supplied them with pickaxes and a barrow, in which to put the ore when they had clipped it down.

This was then to be wheeled to the shaft, and hauled up to the surface in the cage.

The men were not supervised in the workings, but they were overlooked at intervals.

By this means the warders knew whether the prisoners were doing their allotted tasks.

It was very warm below.

Quite a contrast to the cold outside, where the frost was nearly down to zero.

Sometimes it went ever so many degrees below that.

The men were expected to work with the pick and the barrow for a quarter of an hour.

Then they could lay off for awhile in one of the passages.

Here were placed buckets of ice water.

It quenched their thirst and refreshed them.

The perspiration flowed from their bodies in streams, every pore of the skin being open.

Jack now knew what it was to be in the wilds of Siberia, a convict.

It was something, though, to have a companion.

Somebody to talk to.

Not a friend.

A double-dyed villain such as Rewski was, could never be that to a man of Jack's refinement.

His taste was educated and exclusive.

"How do you like it?" asked Rewski. "I had three years here before."

"Did you get away or serve your term?" asked Young Jack.

"No, indeed. I wasn't such a fool. By the living God! they can't hold me long!"

"Don't swear."

"Why not?" inquired Rewski.

"I don't like it, that's all," said Jack.

"Who the devil do you think you are to dictate to me? I'll brain you with this pick if you do!"

"Two can play at that game."

"Let's us play. I'm not running."

"No! No! Man alive! We can't afford to have a row. If you escaped before——"

"I did."

"Then you can do it again, and I can get away with you?"

"Certainly."

"How is it done?"

"Easy as pie. I work the establishment in all grades," replied Rewski.

"What do you mean?"

"I get up a revolt among the prisoners. We kill the guards and make a bolt."

"Where for?" asked Jack.

"The banks of the Genesie River—not so very far from here. I have friends there."

"When do you propose to break out?"

"It will take me a month to put everything on horseback."

"So I suppose."

"Enterprises of great pith and moment cannot be pushed and settled in a hop, skip and a jump."

"Who said so?"

"You seemed to imply so; but a truce to that. If you mean business I'm on."

Rewski leant on his pick and winked at Jack in a knowing manner.

"I do; listen:

"If your pal is with me you will never have cause to regret it."

"That I believe."

"If I'm tough, I'm genuine. I do daring things. When I get pinched by the cops I make the best of it. They all know me; and shall I tell you——"

He hesitated.

"What?"

"They are afraid of me. I'm desperate when I get my mad up."

"How many men have you killed in your time?"

"I should be sorry to tell you; it would make your hair curl, you bet."

"Well, I don't want to know."

"Did you know all that I could tell you, it would spoil your night's rest; my experience is varied."

"What do you mean?"

"I like killing people; it is a fad—a weakness of mine."

"You—like it."

"Just as much as Cain did when he stabbed Abel, his brother."

"That was jealousy."

"Exactly. Abel's first sacrifice went up to Heaven and was accepted by the Lord. Cain was counted out. Hence these tears—it was jealousy between Cain and Abel."

"With you it is different."

"It is a passion," replied Rewski; "a pastime—my only diversion."

"How?"

"I don't care for music, dancing, cards, billiards—things that other men like."

"You——"

"When I want to amuse myself I kill a man or a woman."

"Are you Mr. Hyde, the demon of Dr. Jekyll?"

"No. I am the chourineur, depicted in the mysteries of Paris by Victor Hugo, greatest of novelists."

"You have read."

"My dear fellow, I have absolutely nothing else to do sometimes, when a paternal government shuts me up in a prison for a given time."

"I do not understand."

"Bah! You are a child," sneered Rewski. "You have only got your first conviction just now."

"True."

"What do you know?"

"Very little, I must admit," replied Jack.

"In prison they always keep a good library. It is not all religious rot the warders want to read. They insist upon having rattling good interesting books."

"That is where you got your knowledge?"

"Why certainly. A prison educates you. The chourineur I was talking about was a kind of human beast like me."

"In what way lies the resemblance?"

"In this: he had his murderous fits, like the London Whitechapel woman-maiming fiend. The chourineur saw red at times."

"Well?"

"That indicated a thirst for blood, and he had to go out and kill."

"Is that your disposition?"

Rewski glowered at him.

"Say another word to me and I brain you," he hissed, with the venom of a rattlesnake.

Jack stepped back.

"Look here," he said, "I want to make friends with you. We have traveled together under extreme difficulties and been friendly."

"So we will be to the end. Don't aggravate me. If not, there will be some disturbance."

"Come on," said Jack.

Rewski raised his pick.

"I see red blood!" he yelled.

Jack put himself on the defensive.

"Back!" he cried. "I will not have any interference with my plans! I want to get out of this as quickly as you do, and if we can chip in together for our mutual benefit, I will do so."

"It is too late now," replied Rewski. "You and I must have it out as quickly as possible."

"Very well. I can use a pick as well as you."

"Come on; I am waiting for you! Go ahead! Sail in! Let me see what you are made of!"

They were about to attack one another, when Moscovitch, the master of the mine, came in.

"What's all this?" he demanded. "You are two new-comers; can't you behave yourselves? If not, I shall know how to make you!"

They dropped their picks.

"Now, march off. The guards outside will conduct you to the barracks. Orders will be given to Kolinski to put you in a dungeon, and feed you on black bread and water for a fortnight."

"That's nothing," replied Rewski.

"Does it not frighten you?" asked Moscovitch.

"Not a bit. Make it a month. In that case we should not have the pleasure of seeing your lovely, benevolent countenance for four weeks."

"Insolent!"

"That is what I am generally accused of, but there is not a word of truth in the accusation."

"Your record must be very bad."

"Awful! You will shudder to read it," said Rewski.

Moscovitch produced a book, in which was printed a detailed account of the careers of the convicts sent to the wilds of Siberia by the central government.

He went closer to the nearest oil lamp, and looked at the alphabetical list.

"Turn round," he cried.

"What for?"

"I want to take your number."

Rewski immediately did as he was requested by the master.

On his back was stamped: No. 48. Seventh conviction. For life.

Rewski. Bad character. Dangerous.

"Ha! I have your record now!" exclaimed Moscovitch. "You killed a Polish woman in Warsaw. In Moscow you were the death of a Jew!"

Rewski grinned.

"They've got it wrong there," he remarked.

"How is that?"

"I stabbed three sheenies that night."

"Possibly. I can quite credit your statement. In Valadorrisk you robbed a bank."

"No, I didn't. Your lying police swore I did, but I wasn't in it."

"Silence. At Odessa on the Black Sea, you invaded a ship, and robbed her from stem to stern."

"That is perfectly true. I and some friends of mine did so, but what was the result?"

"How should I know?"

"Dead Sea fruit. All we could get out of the cursed vessel was fifty roubles. Pshaw! we had to cut two throats before we got that."

"Oh, you got more than that," said Master Moscovitch with a grim smile.

It was full of significance.

"Go on," remarked Rewski. "I like to hear what you have to say, because you prison bosses are such awful, thundering liars."

"Hold your peace."

"I can't. Put me in the lowest dungeon, and if you connect with a speaking tube or a telephone you'll hear me keep on holloaing."

"The knout is what you want."

"I've had it—that's ancient history; but allow me to inform you that the prison master who had the cruelty to have me knouted died the next day."

"Who killed him?"

"I did."

"You lying dog, you were in a cell!" cried Moscovitch angrily.

"Yes," replied Rewski; "but you don't understand the under current of prison life."

"Is there such a thing?"

"Why, sure."

"How did you do it?"

"I communicated with a friend outside, through the medium of my lawyer, who was allowed to see me once in three months. He paid a warder to assassinate the master."

"It was done, I read about the affair."

"You could be settled in the same easy way," continued Rewski.

"Why, I would undertake to have your funeral ordered within forty-eight hours."

"This is defiance."

"Of course it is. I am a Russian slave, but mark me, master, I do not intend to remain so all my life."

"If you behave yourself you will in four years enjoy the benefit of the good conduct act."

"I have no faith in that."

"You will be liberated from servitude, given a farm, or be allowed to open a shop in the town."

"Not for me."

"Why not. Is it not a good offer?"

"I want to go back to my old haunts," answered Rewski.

"You will have to wait some time for that, my man. I shall send you and this Englishman to the barracks to be shut up."

"What have I done to offend you?" asked Jack.

"Nothing. You are English."

"Is that enough?"

"Quite. I hate an Englishman wherever I see him. We Russians have not forgotten the Crimea yet, nor the fall of Sebastopol."

"Allow me to inform you," said Jack, "that my father is English, but I am an American."

The master held up his hands in horror.

"Worse and worse! I can tolerate a Britisher sooner than a Yankee."

"Why, pray?"

"England has a monarchy; she is not governed by the mob; but the United States are a democratic community, who haven't the fear of king, queen or emperor before their eyes."

Moscovitch whistled.

Instantly six guards, fully armed, made their appearance.

The master of the mine never made a tour of inspection without having a staff of officers close to him.

They were kept out of sight.

At the same time they were ready for any emergency at a moment's notice.

Moscovitch ordered them to take Jack and Rewski to the barracks.

He took out his tablets.

Tearing away a sheet, he wrote:

"Nos. 48 and 49—insubordinate. Ten days solitary confinement. Names: Rewski and Harkaway.

(Signed) "MOSCOVITCH."

Addressed to—

"KOLINSKI, Master of Prison Barracks."

The two were marched away to the cage and drawn up to the open air.

They were conducted to the barracks and delivered to the gate porter, who in turn put them in a reception room.

It had a sanded floor, three barred windows and a few long benches scattered about.

On the walls were some good chromo-lithos, representing our Savior and the stages of the cross.

There was also a colored copy of Leonardo da Vinci's last supper.

"We're in for it now," said Jack. "You should have had more sense than to have provoked it."

"What's the odds? Who cares?" replied Rewski, laughing immoderately.

"I do."

"What's the odds? Lord! any one would think that you weren't brought up in a wood to be scared by an owl."

"Bosh! I'm not green, but I don't care for solitary confinement in the dark for an indefinite period with only bread and water."

"It won't last long."

"What is to prevent it?" asked Jack.

"We have not been here long, but I have felt the pulses of several people."

"Have you got any one to follow you?"

"Yes, but I cannot give you full details at present, as my plans are not matured."

"Who is your friend?" asked Jack.

"I have several," answered Rewski, "but my very particular chum is an old 'screw'—i. e. turnkey or jailer, named Marski."

"Where did you first meet him?"

"Let me think," replied the hardened criminal. "It was in Odessa. Afterwards I was behind the bars at Kars for a diamond robbery. He was transferred there."

"Then he is a good fellow?"

"Excellent! None better. When I start the revolt he will leave all the doors open."

"Has he said so?"

"It is all arranged, my good friend. Do you think I am gassing and talking about what I know nothing of?"

"I shouldn't think so for a moment after what I have seen of you."

"Have I not given you a specimen of my ability and capacity?"

"I must frankly admit that you have."

"What do you think of me?"

"The same as before."

"Size me up and let me know. I will not be vexed at anything you say."

"You are a clever villain and a man to be avoided by all those who have any respect for themselves."

"Ha, ha! Well diagnosed—he understands me. A smart and ingenious youth."

"You talk well."

"Why should I not? I belong to one of the best families in the ural. I have tartar blood in me."

"Yes—it is no use trying to conceal that, but see," exclaimed Rewski. "If I am a scamp and a blackguard, I mean business."

"Should you get to the Genesie River where would you go?"

"To the North Sea."

"If I ever got near Behring's Straits or Smith's Sound I would make a dash for the Pole."

"More fool you."

"Why so?"

"You'd never get there; many a white man's bones lie bleached in the snow, with the Arctic fox howling over them by way of a requiem."

"I beg to disagree with you," said Jack; "when I get out of this scrape I will have a fling at the North Pole, my man."

"Are you really in earnest about that?"

"I am always in earnest over everything I take in hand, be it ever so humble."

"Bravo! That is the sort of spirit I like. Now, I have sailed in those regions."

"Indeed! You surprise me! What is it you have not done?"

"Very few things, I can assure you. I was on a whaler and we were frozen up in Baffin's Bay for ten months solid. How is that for high in the Arctic? If you want to go I will ship with you."

"I will consider it. We are not out of this rut yet."

"Gee! We soon shall be! I will have a convict revolt in less than three days."

"Are you blowing?" asked Jack.

"If you think so you can call my bluff for all it is worth," replied Rewski. "But hark, a word in your ear."

Jack bent forward.

"You have sincere, wealthy, powerful friends in this city."

"It is possible; but I have no intimation of it."

"Marski told me. I was to inform you Mr. Harry Girdwood is at the Greenland Hotel with your wife, Mr. Mole and a darky."

Jack's heart began to beat quickly.

This was great news.

It must be true, or how could Rewski possibly know the names of his friends?

"Why did you not tell me this before?" he asked.

"I was going to in the mine, but you got ugly, so I resolved to wait," was the reply.

"What are my friends doing?"

"Marski is in communication with them, and they are helping us with money to bribe the warders."

"Cannot they come and see us?"

"No—prisoners are not allowed to see friends or callers of any description."

Jack was delighted beyond measure to hear that his friends were so close to him.

How good, faithful and persevering they were.

He would be able to defeat Irrosk and Hunston yet.

Rewski seemed to understand everything.

But it must be remembered that he was an old criminal and had seen the inside of many prisons, thereby knowing what to do to serve his own ends.

A prison is like a school.

Yet the lessons learned there are not very profitable.

"Marski has told me all about your history," added Rewski.

"How do you manage to talk to him?" asked Jack.

"He comes to the dormitory in the night time when the weary toilers are asleep. He talks to me in whispers. I hear all."

"Do you know that I could be free in an hour if I chose to pay a certain sum of money to Irrosk?"

"I have been told so. Do you mean to do it?"

"Not if I know it," laughed Jack. "I shall fight to the end."

"That is right. Be firm."

At that instant the door of the reception room opened and three persons appeared.

They were Kolinski, Irrosk and Hunston.

This was a great surprise to Jack.

There was a grin of triumph on Hunston's face, and Irrosk seemed pleased.

"Kolinski!" he exclaimed, "Moscovitch reports the prisoners, Harkaway and Rewski, for insubordination."

"I am aware of it, Excellency."

"Rewski shall be imprisoned in the dark cell for ten days on the plainest food."

"What about Harkaway?"

"Let him be taken to the prison yard, tied to the whipping post, and receive fifteen lashes with the knout," said Irrosk.

This was a very severe sentence.

It was as much as any strong man could bear and live.

Fifteen lashes of that long, terrible, encircling, blood-drawing, skin-raising whip!

Many poor creatures had died under the punishment.

"You dare not do it!" cried Jack defiantly.

"I dare do anything here. In Irkutsk I am irresponsible," said Irrosk.

"Very well; I protest."

"Bah! you know my terms."

"And I distinctly refuse to accept them."

"Take the consequences. Away with him. Let the punishment be inflicted at once."

Irrosk spoke angrily.

In fact, he was deeply annoyed at Jack's obstinacy.

Kolinski summoned some of his warders.

Rewski was led to the dark cell and Jack was conducted to the yard.

Here he was stripped to the waist and bound to a high, thick stake.

The prison doctor, hastily summoned, stood near.

It was his duty to feel his pulse after every stroke, as there would be a scandal if he died under the knout.

Irrosk was having his revenge.

Half a dozen warders were gathered in a row.

The executioner approached with the knout.

It was a formidable looking weapon.

"Strikel!" cried Irrosk.

Jack did not flinch.

The knout was raised high in the air.

At that moment there was a noise in the rear.

Hearing this, the executioner hesitated to proceed.

What could the interruption be?

He awaited further orders.

"Strikel!" shouted Irrosk, pale with passion.

A young man was seen advancing with a paper in his hand.

"Stop! I forbid this!" he cried.

It was Harry Girdwood.

Hunston smothered a curse between his thin lips.

This incident was unexpected.

It wasn't in their programme.

They had not anticipated it for a moment.

It was Irrosk's intention to flog Jack until he promised to give him the money he demanded.

Or the knout should be wielded till he did.

"Look here!" continued Harry; "I demand the liberation of that man!"

"Where is your authority?" demanded Irrosk.

"Here!"

"What is it?"

"A pardon for Jack Harkaway from his majesty, the Czar," said Harry.

He showed the pardon.

It was all correct.

Jack was cast loose.

He put on his prison dress, and taking Harry's arm, was allowed to leave.

Irrosk and Hunston gnashed their teeth.

They were baffled again.

Kolinski invited them to lunch.

They accepted, but neither luxuries nor wine could ease their minds.

They had to own to a confession of defeat.

But worse was to come.

The warder who had Rewski in charge was one of his friends.

He left him in the convalescent ward of the infirmary while he made the black hole as comfortable as he could.

A hidden lamp, a box of matches, some canned meat and fish, with a few books and tobacco, would render the captivity endurable.

But Rewski did not mean to go to the dark cell.

There were twenty convalescents in the ward.

He urged them to attack the masters and escape.

They agreed to do so.

Led by Rewski, they armed themselves with legs of chairs, plates broken in half, bits of coal stuffed into the toe of a sock, to be used like a sandbag.

Hunston had gone away.

He wanted to find out what Young Jack and his friends were going to do.

Wherever they went he intended to pursue.

Kolinski and Irrosk were together.

Suddenly they became aware of an eruption of convicts.

Like wild beasts, Rewski and the rest fell on them.

They were battered about until they sank insensible on the ground.

The convicts were not satisfied till they had battered their skulls.

When they knew they were dead, they ate what was on the table and drank the wine.

This done they departed.

Some took to the woods, others pursued the main road to Kalensk on the Genesie.

Rewski had escaped as he said he would.

Young Jack was free.

It can be imagined what a glad meeting there was between Clara and her husband.

There was plenty to talk about and tell, before Jack fully understood how, by the influence of the British Ambassador, pardon had come to him, and he had been snatched from the horrors of a Siberian prison, as one might be snatched from the grave.

CHAPTER V.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN our friends, and they were a joyful party, you may be sure, sat down to a quiet supper in the Hotel Greenland that night, Jack felt that all his troubles were over.

Judge then of his horror and dismay, when after leaving his room for a few moments just before retiring, he returned to find Clara missing under circumstances which excited his suspicions at once.

The door stood wide open—Clara's bonnet hung in its accustomed place, with her outer wraps beside it.

It was perfectly evident that she had no intention of leaving the hotel, and yet she was gone, and it was now midnight.

Jack's heart almost ceased to beat when he hurried down-stairs and learned the truth.

A messenger had called at the hotel with a note for Mrs. Harkaway during Jack's brief absence.

Clara had hurried down-stairs to the ladies' parlor, meeting the messenger—a woman—there.

What passed between them the housekeeper could not say, but this much she did know—Clara followed the woman directly out of the hotel.

What became of Clara after that the housekeeper did not know.

When Young Jack aroused Harry Girdwood and told him all about it he was almost frantic.

"Keep cool, dear boy," said Harry. "This, I take it, is an attempt on the part of Hunston and Irrosk to be revenged. They dare not lay a finger on you, so the dastardly cowards strike at you through your wife."

"Harry, it is undoubtedly true. We must instantly act. Shall we wake up Mole and Monday and tell them what has happened?"

"I say no, decidedly! Let's start right out ourselves, Jack, and trust to our wits to get us out of this terrible scrape."

"Oh, Harry! I'm almost mad! To think of what I have been through—of what my dear wife has been through to rescue me, and now to have this come suddenly upon us—it is more than human nature can bear."

"Brace up, Jack! Be a man!"

"I'm going to, Harry. Come, dear boy, we'll move at once and not say a word to a living soul."

"Unfortunately it is not safe to do it. We risk our lives by attempting to interfere with the plots and evil schemes of these Russian officials. If it is only Hunston I shall be relieved, for I know the ways of the scoundrel only too well."

"And don't I?" said Jack. "Who can know him better? Ah, Harry, if it were not for that man life would be plain sailing for us indeed. But come, let us go. We have already wasted too much time here."

They hastily left the hotel.

While they lingered for a moment on the sidewalk the housekeeper came up to them.

The woman had her shawl gathered about her head and seemed greatly agitated.

"She went in a drosky—I have just learned it, Mr. Harkaway," she said. "She was driven in the direction of the river."

"By the woman who brought her the letter?" asked Jack, eagerly.

"No, no! By a man connected with the governor's house."

"Ah! It is as I thought. How did you learn this, my good woman?"

"My sister's husband keeps a small wine shop around the corner," said the housekeeper. "It was in front of his place that the lady entered the drosky. My sister happened to be standing at the door and heard her say: 'Take me to my husband as quick as possible. Don't lose a moment! I should never forgive myself if he should die before I reached his side.'"

"The old trick," said Harry. "A false message has been delivered to Clara, old man. She thinks you have met with an accident or something of the sort."

"Undoubtedly so. Let us hurry around to the wine shop and find out which way the drosky went."

They did this but learned nothing.

The woman only knew what she had already told.

An empty drosky happened to be passing at this moment.

Jack hailed it.

"Look here, my friend," he said to the driver, "do you want to make a hundred roubles?"

"Indeed I do, sir," replied the man, with sparkling eyes.

"A lady has just now left this shop in a drosky; we want to follow and overtake her. Did you see anything of such a party?"

"Passed them not five minutes ago, sir."

"Where—where?"

"On Michaelovitch street, heading out of town."

"Is your horse equal to the task of overtaking that drosky?"

"I think so, sir. He's a good one."

"Do it and the hundred roubles are yours."

"Something down, your excellency. I do not know you."

"Half down, and here it is!" cried Jack.

He handed over the money, and with Harry sprang into the drosky, and they were whirled away.

Jack leaned back and covered his face with his hands.

"Harry, I'm almost wild," he said. "If anything serious happens to my dear wife, I——"

"There, there! None of that, Jack! We must not talk, but act!"

"Ah, but I'm all unnerved, Harry. I've been through so much since we parted in St. Petersburg."

"Don't I know, dear boy? Cheer up! This will all come out right!"

"You don't think we are on the wrong track?"

"I'm sure we ain't. I have confidence in this man!"

It was but a short time before Harry's confidence was fully justified. As they passed outside the limits of the town they caught sight of a drosky going at great speed at some distance ahead of them.

Their driver instantly turned, and pointing to the vehicle, said:

"There it is, your excellency. You see that I was right."

"Are you sure it is the same one?" asked Jack, eagerly.

"Absolutely certain."

"Faster then—faster! Your horse has certainly gained on theirs or we wouldn't have overtaken it so soon."

"Excellency," said the driver, impressively, "let us not make a mistake. We run a great risk in being too hasty. That drosky belongs to the governor. I dare not lend a hand to anything like an attack, and it would be death for you as well as for me if this lady is being removed by his orders."

"Don't talk of risk! Do as you promised!" cried Jack angrily. "Great heavens, man, that is my wife who is in that drosky and——"

"Hold on!" broke in Harry. "Not too fast, Jack. Perhaps our friend here may be able to help us in some other way. Speak up, my man. What do you advise?"

"I was going to advise keeping the drosky in sight and following it to its destination, your excellency."

"I have no patience for anything of the sort!" cried Jack. "Overtake it! You must—you shall, if I have to take the reins myself!"

"That I could not allow, your excellency. I value my life as well as any other man."

"A hundred roubles extra for you if you will do it!"

"Well, well! Since you are so liberal, so let it be. I'll risk it."

Then fast as the drosky had flown before, it flew faster still.

Rapidly they came up with the vehicle ahead of them.

Jack craned his neck to try to catch a glimpse of its occupant, but without success.

Once the driver looked back, and then lashed his horse on the faster.

They were now nearing the river, the road which they were following running parallel with it.

Suddenly the drosky turned aside and disappeared among the trees, which here grew thickly along the river's bank.

"What place is that?" demanded Jack.

"There is nothing there but woods," returned the driver. "Stay, though! There is a road there leading down to an old bathing-house. That may be the place they are heading for—I cannot tell."

"Take us there instantly," cried Jack. "That's our place—I feel it in my bones."

But before they reached the turn, they saw the drosky standing among the trees, a little way down the road.

It was empty.

The jaded horse was the only living thing visible.

Jack halted his vehicle and leaped out.

"Look here, Harry!" he cried. "There is no longer a doubt of the truth!"

"Poor Clara was here."

It was a dainty little handkerchief which Jack held up to view.

It was marked with Clara's initial.

He had found it on the floor of the drosky.

"I can go no further, gentlemen," said the driver. "Not for worlds would I get mixed up with the governor's business. I have brought you up with this drosky—that is all I agreed to do."

"At least you can wait here till we return?" asked Jack.

"I will wait at the turn of the road, your excellency, but not here."

Forced to be satisfied with this, Jack and Harry ran at full speed down the hill.

The way was thickly wooded.

As they neared the bottom of the hill they saw a light shining ahead of them among the trees.

"Go slow, old man," whispered Harry, laying his hand upon Jack's arm. "Everything depends upon our coolness now."

"What's that curious noise?" asked Jack.

"The river running at the foot of the slope."

"The bath house cannot be far off, then."

"Probably not. I've no doubt that the light we see marks the spot."

"Harry, you are armed of course."

"Certainly. And you, Jack?"

"I've got the new revolver which I bought to-day immediately after my release."

"We'll make a desperate fight if Clara is a prisoner in that house."

"Let Hunston beware if this is his work," replied Jack, between his clenched teeth. "It won't be at all healthy for him to meet me now!"

They stole on, coming in sight of the river in a moment.

A boat lay close to the shore.

There was no one in it, however.

Half hidden among the trees was the old bath house.

The light burned in the window toward them.

Young Jack and Harry crept close up to it and peered in.

Two men sat at a table smoking, with a bottle of vodka between them.

Hunston was one—for this Jack was prepared, but his breath almost stopped when he saw that the other was the murderer, Rewski, his old cell mate in the mine.

Jack raised his arm and would have dashed in the window in his eagerness to reach them, but Harry caught his hand.

"Hist! Patience!" he breathed. "By too much haste we may spoil all. We want Clara first and revenge afterwards. Let us listen to what they are saying."

"But, Harry——"

"Wait, Jack. It must be so. Who is that man?"

"Rewski, the instigator of the convicts' revolt, the man I have been telling you about."